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DCR LAUNCHES NEW “PARK PASSPORT” PROGRAM

Chronicle your adventures in state parks with a booklet and individual park stamps

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is launching a new Park Passport program in 76 state parks across the Commonwealth, providing little blue passports and artist-designed stamps to let park users chronicle their adventures in the great outdoors. The celebratory launch is scheduled for Saturday, June 28, in Amherst (details below).

The free Park Passport program, part of the national No Child Left Inside initiative, is open to anyone and everyone who visits a participating park. The goal is to encourage families to discover and explore the plants and animals, fresh air, trails, beaches, fields, picnic areas, and campgrounds in the more than 450,000 acres of Massachusetts state parks. Each passport has special pages to record the dates that individual parks were visited and to jot down thoughts and impressions of each park. It also includes tips for safe hiking and taking care of the environment, and a guide to identifying animal tracks.

At each park, children will find the colorful, birdhouse-like box that holds the Passport stamp. Also, when they have visited each park in a region, any child under 14 will be given a T-shirt showing all the colorful stamps from that region.

“These little passports open up a whole world of opportunity for exploring our state parks,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. “With gasoline prices keeping people closer to home, and Massachusetts offering one of the largest state park systems in the nation, we hope our park users will consider this, quite literally, as a passport to adventure.”

The Park Passport program was conceived and developed by two DCR park rangers, Peter Michaels, district ranger for the Connecticut River Valley, and Jason Hunt, district ranger for the Quabbin Highlands. The individual park stamps were designed by artist and illustrator Micha Archer of Leverett. The program is being partly funded with a \$36,000 grant from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust.

DCR will hold the official Park Passport launch on Saturday, June 28, at 3 p.m. at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, 125 West Bay Road, in Amherst. Micha Archer will sign free posters featuring all 76 park stamp designs, and park rangers and DCR firefighters will

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chat with visitors. The event will include children's crafts, demonstrations, light refreshments, and a drawing for a brand new children's mountain bike and helmet.

"We are very excited about this new program," said Priscilla Geigis, DCR's director of state parks. "The passports are a wonderful gateway into our beautiful forests, beaches, and parks, for an afternoon, a weekend, or an entire vacation. I can't wait to see more families joining us in the parks."

For more information on the Park Passport program, and the launch event on June 28, visit www.mass.gov/dcr/passport/index.html.

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.